NUMB. XL.

The SPECTATOR.

Ac ne forte putes me, quæ facere ipſe recuſem,
Cum recte tractant alii, laudare maligne;
Ille per extentum funem mihi poſſe videtur
Ire Poeta, meum qui pectus inaniter angit,
Irritat, mulcet, falſis terroribus implet,
Ut magus; & modo me Thebis, modo ponit Athenis. Hor.

Monday, April 16. 1711.

THE *Engliſh* Writers of Tragedy are poſſeſſed with a Notion, that when they repreſent a virtuous or innocent Perſon in Diſtreſs, they ought not to leave him till they have delivered him out of his Troubles, or made him triumph over his Enemies. This Errour they have been led into by a ridiculous Doctrine in modern Criticiſm, that they are obliged to an equal Diſtribution of Rewards and Puniſhments, and an impartial Execution of poetical Juſtice. Who were the firſt that eſtabliſhed this Rule I know not; but I am ſure it has no Foundation in Nature, in Reaſon, or in the Practice of the Ancients. We find that Good and Evil happen alike to all Men on this Side the Grave; and as the principal Deſign of Tragedy is to raiſe Commiſeration and Terrour in the Minds of the Audience, we ſhall defeat this great End, if we always make Virtue and Innocence happy and ſucceſsful. Whatever Croſſes and Diſappointments a good Man ſuffers in the Body of the Tragedy, they will make but ſmall Impreſſion on our Minds, when we know that in the laſt Act he is to arrive at the End of his Wiſhes and Deſires. When we ſee him engaged in the Depth of his Afflictions, we are apt to comfort ourſelves, becauſe we are ſure he will find his Way out of them; and that his Grief, how great ſoever it may be at preſent, will ſoon terminate in Gladneſs. For this Reaſon the ancient Writers of Tragedy treated Men in their Plays, as they are dealt with in the World, by making Virtue ſometimes happy and ſometimes miſerable, as they found it in the Fable which they made choice of, or as it might affect their Audience in the moſt agreeable Manner. *Ariſtotle* conſiders the Tragedies that were written in either of theſe Kinds, and obſerves, That thoſe which ended unhappily, had always pleaſed the People, and carried away the Prize in the publick Diſputes of the Stage, from thoſe that ended happily. Terrour and Commiſeration leave a pleaſing Anguiſh in the Mind; and fix the Audience in ſuch a ſerious Compoſure of Thought, as is much more laſting and delightful than any little tranſient Starts of Joy and Satisfaction. Accordingly we find, that more of our *Engliſh* Tragedies have ſucceeded, in which the Favourites of the Audience ſink under their Calamities, than thoſe in which they recover themſelves out of them. The beſt Plays of this Kind are the *Orphan*, *Venice preſerv'd*, *Alexander the Great*, *Theodoſius*, *All for Love*, *Oedipus*, *Oroonoko*, *Othello*, &c. *King Lear* is an admirable Tragedy of the ſame Kind, as *Shakeſpear* wrote it; but as it is reformed according to the chymerical Notion of poetical Juſtice, in my humble Opinion it has loſt half its Beauty. At the ſame time I muſt allow, that there are very noble Tragedies which have been framed upon the other Plan, and have ended happily; as indeed moſt of the good Tragedies, which have been written ſince the ſtarting of the abovementioned Criticiſm, have taken this Turn: As the *Mourning Bride*, *Tamerlane*, *Ulyſſes*, *Phædra* and *Hyppolitus*, with moſt of Mr. *Dryden*'s. I muſt alſo allow, that many of *Shakeſpear*'s, and ſeveral of the celebrated Tragedies of Antiquity, are caſt in the ſame Form. I do not therefore diſpute againſt this Way of writing Tragedies, but againſt the Criticiſm that would eſtabliſh this as the only Method; and by that Means would very much cramp the *Engliſh* Tragedy, and perhaps give a wrong Bent to the Genius of our Writers.

The Tragi-Comedy, which is the Product of the *Engliſh* Theatre, is one of the moſt monſtrous Inventions that ever enter'd into a Poet's Thoughts

Thoughts. An Author might as well think of weaving the Adventures of *Æneas* and *Hudibras* into one Poem, as of writing such a motly Piece of Mirth and Sorrow. But the Absurdity of these Performances is so very visible, that I shall not insist upon it.

The same Objections which are made to Tragi-Comedy, may in some Measure be apply'd to all Tragedies that have a double Plot in them; which are likewise more frequent upon the *English* Stage, than upon any other: For tho' the Grief of the Audience, in such Performances, be not chang'd into another Passion, as in Tragi-Comedies; it is diverted upon another Object, which weakens their Concern for the principal Action, and breaks the Tide of Sorrow, by throwing it into different Channels. This Inconvenience, however, may in a great Measure be cur'd, if not wholly remov'd, by the skilful Choice of an Under-Plot, which may bear such a near Relation to the principal Design, as to contribute towards the Completion of it, and be concluded by the same Catastrophe.

There is also another Particular, which may be reckon'd among the Blemishes, or rather the false Beauties, of our *English* Tragedy: I mean those particular Speeches, which are commonly known by the Name of *Rants*. The warm and passionate Parts of a Tragedy, are always the most taking with the Audience; for which Reason we often see the Players pronouncing, in all the Violence of Action, several Parts of the Tragedy which the Author writ with great Temper, and design'd that they should have been so acted. I have seen *Powell* very often raise himself a loud Clap by this Artifice. The Poets that were acquainted with this Secret, have given frequent Occasion for such Emotions in the Actor, by adding Vehemence to Words where there was no Passion, or inflaming a real Passion into Fustian. This hath filled the Mouths of our Heroes with Bombast; and given them such Sentiments, as proceed rather from a Swelling than a Greatness of Mind. Unnatural Exclamations, Curses, Vows, Blasphemies, a Defiance of Mankind, and an Outraging of the Gods, frequently pass upon the Audience for tow'ring Thoughts, and have accordingly met with infinite Applause.

I shall here add a Remark, which I am afraid our Tragick Writers may make an ill use of. As our Heroes are generally Lovers, their Swelling and Bluſtring upon the Stage very much recommends them to the fair Part of their Audience. The Ladies are wonderfully pleas'd to see a Man insulting Kings, or affronting the Gods, in one Scene, and throwing himself at the Feet of his Mistress in another. Let him behave himself insolently towards the Men, and abjectly towards the fair one, and it is ten to one but he proves a Favourite of the Boxes. *Dryden* and *Lee*, in several of their Tragedies, have practis'd this Secret with good Success.

But to shew how a *Rant* pleases beyond the most just and natural Thought that is not pronounced with Vehemence, I would desire the Reader, when he sees the Tragedy of *Oedipus*, to observe how quietly the Hero is dismiss'd at the End of the third Act, after having pronounc'd the following Lines, in which the Thought is very natural, and apt to move Compassion.

To you, good Gods, I make my last Appeal,
Or clear my Virtues, or my Crimes reveal.
If in the Maze of Fate I blindly run,
And backward trod those Paths I sought to shun;
Impute my Errours to your own Decree,
My Hands are guilty, but my Heart is free.

Let us then observe with what Thunder-claps of Applause he leaves the Stage, after the Impieties and Execrations at the End of the fourth Act; and you will wonder to see an Audience so cursed and so pleased at the same Time.

O that as oft I have at Athens *seen,*
[Where, by the Way, there was no Stage till many Years after *Oedipus*.]
The Stage arise, and the big Clouds descend;
So now, in very Deed, I might behold,
This pond'rous Globe, and all you marble Roof,
Meet, like the Hands of Jove, *and crush Mankind.*
For all the Elements, &c.

ADVERTISEMENT.

Having spoken of Mr. Powell, *as sometimes raising himself Applause from the ill Taste of an Audience; I must do him the Justice to own, that he is excellently form'd for a Tragedian, and, when he pleases, deserves the Admiration of the best Judges; as I doubt not but he will in the* Conquest of Mexico, *which is acted for his own Benefit To-morrow Night.*

ERRATA.

In Friday's Spectator, *Col.* 2, *Line* 33, *for* are laudable, *read* are not laudable. *In that of* Saturday, *the third Column, for* prolicit Ampuleas, *read* Projicit Ampullas.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

For the Benefit of the Author.
By Her Majesty's Company of Comedians.

AT the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane, this present Monday, being the 16th of April, will be presented, a new Comedy, call'd, Injur'd Love; or, The Lover's Satisfaction. The principal Parts to be perform'd by Mr. Wilks, Mr. Cibber, Mr. Mills, Mr. Dogget, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Pinkethman, Mr. Bullock, Mr. Norris, Mrs. Oldfield, Mrs. Bradshaw, Mrs. Bullow, Mrs. Knight, and Mrs. Bicknell.

N.B. Advertisements for Plays will be continued, from time to time, in this Paper.

This Play is sold by Jacob Tonson, at Shakespear's Head over against Catharine-street in the Strand.

Dropt the 11th Instant betwixt 7 and 8 in the Evening, between Richmond-street and King-street, Soho, a small Gold Watch with Black Figures on the Dial-Plate, a Chain, and a Hook wash'd with Gold. Whoever brings the Watch to Dr. Shadwell's, shall have 2 Guineas Reward, or if sold their Money again.

A rare Collection of foreign Original Pictures, and of the most celebrated Masters, never before expos'd to Sale, will be sold by Auction by Mr. Cooper, to Morrow, being the 17th of this Instant April at 12 a Clock, in the Old Palace-yard at the House joyning to the Stone-stairs going up to the House of Lords. The Pictures are ready to be view'd this Day and to the time of Sale; where Catalogues may be had, and at most Coffee-houses about St. James's, Charing-Cross, and Westminster.

This Day is Publish'd,

A true Narrative of what pass'd at the Examination of the Marquis de Guiscard, at the Cockpit, the 8th of March, 1711: His stabbing Mr. Harley, and other Precedent; and subsequent Facts relating to the Life of the said Guiscard. Printed for John Morphew near Stationers-Hall. Price 6d.

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